

PREBLE COUNTY'S FOOT PRINT ROCK

by

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In the early 1980s a scribbled note surfaced in the county files of the Ohio Historical Society's Department of Archaeology indicating simply that there was a rock near Gettysburg., Preble County, Ohio, with a human footprint on it. Gettysburg is a small crossroads community on Route 40, the old National Road, but without any more detailed locality information I deferred looking for this Footprint Rock for quite some time, even though the note suggested a previously unrecorded petroglyph.

Quite a few years later I was curious enough to leave Interstate 70 and drive through Gettysburg. About a half mile east of the village, I stopped at a gas station (no longer standing) and asked the attendant if he knew the location of the rock, and he pointed back to the road and told me, "It's right there." Walking back to the highway, I saw a brown and white sign that read "Foot Print Rock," (Figure 1) only a few feet in front of which was a large, flat metamorphic glacial erratic of foliated gneiss with a rosey surface that has been subjected to differential erosion.

When viewed at the proper angle, preferably with half-closed eyes, one portion of the eroded surface does look something like the impression of a human left foot (Figure 2). A closer look at a different angle (Figure 3) dispels the illusion and shows that the feature is a freak of nature, formed by a combination of natural erosion and human imagination. The miniature pothole measures about 4 by 10 inches and vaguely resembles the outline of a human foot but clearly was carved by nature. In May, 2001, HRG Consultants, Inc., completed an Outline of Draft Management Strategies for the Ohio National Road National Scenic Byway. This is available on the Ohio Historical Societies website. Among their Strategies for Historic and Archaeological Resources (p. 13) is:

5. Conduct further research on the significance of Footprint Rock in eastern Jefferson Township, Preble County.

It is not known whether any such "further research" has been conducted, but it should not take more than a brief visit to establish the fact that Foot Print Rock is neither historic nor archaeological. This seems to be generally recognized, for an e-mail on American Road Magazine's on-line forum refers to the site as a "short, sweet, and slightly silly stop," which pretty much sums it up. There is also a "fair but balanced," not to mention entertaining, account of this geological joke on the Roadside America website (Shull 2007).

References

American Road Forum

2008 July 25, 2008, e-mail from
"Road Scholar," available at
<http://americanroadmagazine.com/foirum/index.php?showtopic=915>

HRG Consultants

2001 Outline of Draft Management
Strategies for the Ohio National Road
National Scenic Byway. Available
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2007, Gettysburg, Ohio-Footprint
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Figure 1 (Murphy):
Rock and marker
along Old Route 40,
looking west toward
Gettysburg, Preble
Co., Ohio.



*Figure 2 (Murphy):
Footprint, looking east.
Note shadow from
historic marker.
Photo ca. 1990.*



*Figure 3 (Murphy):
Recent close-up of rock
showing erosional origin.
Looking south.*